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Environment Department Targets Convenience Store Safety

(Santa Fe, NM) — Based upon the high numbers of violent acts perpetrated against convenience store employees at night, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) today announced its plans to draft regulations to make these stores safer for clerks and customers.

“These regulations will help save lives and reduce crime while providing stronger protections for convenience store workers and the general public,” said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. “While the safety measures required will cost money, they are affordable. I believe that there is no cost/benefit analysis for a human life.”

In recent years, a series of high profile convenience store acts of violence, including the well-publicized murders of clerks in Tucumcari and Hobbs, have highlighted the need for better regulatory protection of late night retail employees. Recognizing this need, Senator Richard Martinez sponsored and the Legislature passed Senate Joint Memorial 4 last spring. It directed NMED’s Occupational Health and Safety Bureau (OHSB) to investigate the problem and suggest solutions. These recommendations are the result of that study.

If enacted, requirements in these draft regulations will include:

- Increased lighting in parking and store areas
- Windows clear of signage
- Camera/security link to police stations or silent alarm
- Time lock safes
- Employee training on safety and security issues
- Closing between the hours of 11 pm and 5 am or putting an additional person on duty if a violent act has recently occurred or safety guidelines cannot be met.

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These recommendations are part of the bureau's recently completed study of violent or potentially violent acts against convenience store employees between the hours of 11 pm and 5 am. To compile data on violent acts, OHSB contacted police departments in Albuquerque/Bernalillo County, Farmington, Hobbs, Las Cruces, Santa Fe and Taos as well as the State Police and the New Mexico Department of Labor. The study focused on the period of January 1998 through April 2003.

Examining data for both clerks inside stores as well as acts perpetrated against anyone else on the property, the OHSB study found 16 reported homicides, 24 rapes, 37 kidnappings, 392 batteries, 1,451 assaults, 467 aggravated assaults, 7 drive-by shootings, 2,633 robberies, 70 suicides and 23,432 reports of theft, among thousands of other reports.

"This data is sobering," said OHSB Chief Georgia Cleverley. "Before measures are taken to better protect clerks and customers, I will definitely think twice about entering one of these stores after dark, let alone allowing one of my daughters to work in one on the graveyard shift."

OHSB plans to have draft regulations to Secretary Curry by November 1. These will then be reviewed by the state Environmental Improvement Board at a public hearing. OHSB also plans to hold a series of town halls in the six municipalities studied to better inform the public on convenience store safety issues.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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